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ABSTRACT

No institution is better positioned to address the problems facing today's communities than the community college. The colleges are community-based and, through community-based programming (CBP), can place themselves at the center of the organizations and institutions, and collaborate with formal or informal leaders devoted to resolving community issues. CBP envisions a cooperative process in which the community college serves as the leader and catalyst in effecting collaboration among the members of its community. This not only helps bring about community renewal, but brings benefits to the colleges as well. CBP allows for a rational process for making decisions and helps institutions deal with long term choices, instead of merely focusing on day-to-day problems. CBP also provides an ongoing process for evaluating the college mission, which can often be pulled in many directions and misunderstood by the college community or the community at large. By providing a means for building broad-based support, CBP ensures that there will be more people working to obtain resources for the college, and also allows the community to use its resources more effectively and efficiently. Also, CBP provides the means for individual and community renewal by placing the responsibility and authority for renewal with the individual, thereby placing the individual citizen in charge of his or her own fate. Finally, CBP assists communities in utilizing their resources more effectively through working with other organizations, helping the colleges ensure that the door remains open to virtually all segments of society. (MAB)

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Community-Based Programming: The Community College As Leader And Catalyst

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INTRODUCTION

America's communities are in trouble. Spin the wheel and stop on an issue: inadequate and inaccessible health care for large segments of the population; unemployment and underemployment for minorities and women; adult illiteracy that knows no gender, color, or age; and any number of other issues face virtually every community in America. Problems remain unsolved and issues remain unresolved as past and current approaches to solving problems and resolving issues have fallen short. People feel helpless, that things are out of control; school teachers and students are shot daily; street gangs declare a truce prohibiting any more killing and looting for a few days. Communities are literally crying for help. What must happen, and there are some signs pointing in the right direction, is that community organizations and institutions, formal and informal leaders, and interested citizens must join together to identify and resolve broad-based issues that cut across political and socioeconomic boundaries.

Where does the community turn in its attempt to improve the quality of life for its citizens? One place is the local community college, for community colleges cross political and socioeconomic boundaries and are mandated by law to improve the quality of life within their service regions. I know from my 17 years as a community college president that life has never been easy for community college leaders, for they have had to carve out their places both in higher education and in the community. Past accomplishments aside, as a result of the myriad issues facing their communities and the failure to resolve these issues, community colleges now face one of their greatest challenges: how to work with community leaders to identify and resolve those issues that threaten the health and welfare of the community and its people and how to bring about individual and community renewal. Can the community college, working in concert with other community agencies, institutions, and organizations, successfully face these challenges? Or has the community college been too successful in establishing itself as a member of the higher education establishment and therefore become a bit too comfortable with its past accomplishments and on-campus operations? Have we forgotten that almost 50 years ago the President's Commission on Higher Education for American Democracy (the Truman Commission) called upon the nation's public junior colleges to become forces for community renewal? How community colleges respond to these challenges will have an impact that extends well beyond any one community or any one community college; how the community colleges respond to these challenges will help shape America's future and will determine, in part, whether communities renew themselves or continue to wither away.

Community college leaders can take an important step toward helping communities identify and resolve issues of major importance if their colleges function as both leaders and catalysts in their communities. In order to perform these dual roles, the community college

needs to utilize a process that places the institution at the center of those organizations, institutions, agencies, and leaders devoted to resolving community issues, for it is from the center that community colleges can be most effective in achieving their mission. Community-based programming places the community college in the center and is the most effective process for assisting the community college to function as both leader and catalyst in seeking resolution of major issues.

Assumptions

Why would one select the community college to play the key role in bringing about individual and community renewal? What assumptions can one make about community colleges before suggesting how they should interact with their communities in resolving broad-based community issues? The following assumptions provide the foundation for this discussion.

- It is assumed that community colleges are community-based institutions in regard to mission, service area, funding, and governance. As community-based institutions, community colleges occupy a symbiotic relationship with their communities. Thus community improvement is part and parcel of the community college mission.
- It is assumed that the governing board and institutional leaders are committed to fulfilling the community college's mission as a community-based institution. Without this commitment, the mission cannot be fully achieved.
- It is assumed that the college leadership, especially presidential leadership, can reposition the community college as needed in order for it to achieve its mission as a community based institution.
- It is assumed that, by applying a model of community-based programming, the institution can more effectively and efficiently fulfill its role as a community-based institution, including collaboration with the people and their leaders and other agencies and organizations in identifying and resolving issues that could not be resolved were the community college to act alone.
- Finally, it is assumed that community organizations and agencies, including the community college, are committed to community-based programming as a means of empowering citizens to identify and resolve issues and to improve the quality of life for all members of the community.

Community-Based Programming

A community-based programming model was developed at North Carolina State University and is currently being utilized in the Kellogg-funded ACCLAIM project, a project that works with the 114 community colleges in Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Although the purpose of this discussion is to build a rationale for community colleges to make community-based programming a top priority rather than to discuss the ACCLAIM project or community-based programming in detail, a brief overview of community-based programming seems in order here. The overview is by intent both brief and incomplete. For an in-depth discussion of community-based programming, presidents, trustees, and others should read Edgar J. Boone's Community-Based Programming: An Opportunity and Imperative for the Community College (Boone, 1992). In this document, Boone defines community-based programming as a "cooperative process that involves a series of processual tasks in which the community college serves as the leader and catalyst in effecting collaboration among the people, their leaders, and other community-based organizations and agencies within its service area in identifying and seeking resolution to major issues that are of critical concern to the community and its people." (Boone, p. 2, 1992).

Boone's model consists of 15 processual tasks that, if followed, should enhance the community college's ability to function in the dual roles of leader and catalyst. Included among the processual tasks in the Boone model is the need for community colleges to do the following: reexamine their mission, repositioning it as needed; scan the social, political, and economic environments of their service region; legitimate issues identified by the scanning; establish priorities among the issues identified; identify the target publics affected by the issues; map the target publics and stakeholder groups; identify formal and informal leaders; identify and involve stakeholders and their leaders in resolving the issues; build a coalition for resolving the community issues; build consensus among the various members of the coalition; commit resources to resolving the issues; develop a plan of action for resolving the issues; carry out the plan of action; and evaluate the results, including a consistent scanning of the environment to determine what new issues are emerging or how an identified issue is changing (Boone, 1992). Each processual task, in one way or another, involves other community organiza-

tions, institutions, agencies, members of the target public, stakeholders, and others affected or potentially affected by broad-based community issues. That is, Boone's model never suggests that the community college work alone to implement community-based programming.

Why Engage in Community-Based Programming?

What behooves community colleges to engage in community-based programming? Following are some of the reasons why community college leaders should look seriously at new and different ways of approaching their missions and serving their communities.

• In the 1970s when community colleges were opening at the rate of one a week, community college leaders often took on all challenges with equal vigor. The phrase suggesting that community colleges could be "all things to all people" became a part of the community college lexicon. Often, as a result of the "all-things" syndrome, community college leaders utilized much of their creativity and resources reacting to day-to-day problems rather than engaging in a rational process of determining what broad issues the college, in collaboration with other community organizations, institutions, and agencies, should help resolve. The community-based programming model provides a logical and rational process for making decisions, including identifying and resolving issues.

• As a result of reacting (often over-reacting) to daily pressures, community colleges are often viewed by their communities as followers devoted to solving narrow problems rather than as leaders devoted to resolving broad-based community issues. Community-based programming clearly places the community college in a leadership role within the community, enabling the institution to assist other organizations and agencies in breaking away from narrow agendas.

• The community college mission is often pulled in a number of directions, resulting in a mission that is often not well understood by members of the college community or by members of the community at large. When the mission is discussed it is often in relationship to an accreditation visit or to a new program that is to be added. Community-based programming provides an orderly, non-threatening, ongoing process for examining the mission and repositioning it as needed.

• When community college leaders approach the state legislature or the local governing body, they often do so alone, for strong advocates from the community who are willing to fight for resources for the institution are often not available. Community-based programming provides a means for building broad-based community support, for once other groups join the community college in resolving community issues, they are more likely to work to obtain resources for the college.

• As suggested at the beginning of this discussion, America's communities are in trouble, often due to a lack of leadership that understands community issues and that can marshall forces to resolve issues and bring about community renewal. Community-based programming provides the means for individual and community renewal, placing the responsibility and authority for renewal with the individual, thereby once again placing the individual citizen in charge of his or her own fate.

• The community college should not and cannot exist in a vacuum. To attempt to do so is to cut off the life supports that are required of all institutions and agencies devoted to serving the public. If the community college's service ends at the campus or consists only of credit courses and programs, then the institution falls far short of achieving its mission as a community-based institution. Community-based programming demands that the college interact with its social, political, and economic environments.

• Limited resources and changing demands are causing community colleges to retrench in many areas, including denying access to some students. Community-based programming aids the community college in utilizing its resources more effectively and efficiently through working with other organizations and institutions, thereby helping to assure that the college's door remains open to virtually all segments of society.

• Finally, and most importantly, every community college should utilize whatever means possible to fulfill its mission as a community-based institution of higher education. An important tool for achieving this mission is community-based programming. Through achieving its mission, the community college will increase its student enrollments and its resources.

Conclusions

Not since the early 1970s has the community college been in a better position to make an impact on its communities. President Clinton's call for community service as a means of revitalizing America places the community college in an excellent position to be a leader in this revitalization. What has been missing in the past has been a rational framework and well defined process for identifying issues, establishing priorities, and joining with other community leaders to resolve issues. Community-based programming provides the framework and process for community colleges to bring others together for community renewal. No challenge in America is greater; no institution is better positioned to meet the challenge than are the nation's community colleges; no process is better suited to help leaders rethink their roles in relationship to their communities.

References

Boone, Edgar J. Community-Based Programming: An Opportunity and Imperative for the Community College. Raleigh: The Department of Adult and Community College Education, North Carolina State University. December, 1992.

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